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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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January 6, 2003

### **Kingsville Agents at the Sarita Checkpoint Discover 15 Persons in Hidden Compartment** *Immigrants Placed in Dangerous Situation*

*McALLEN, Texas* – Chief Patrol Agent Jose E. Garza announces that Border Patrol Agents of the Kingsville Border Patrol Station assigned to the Sarita, Texas, Traffic Checkpoint discovered 15 immigrants hidden in a truck hauling tires. The driver of the vehicle was arrested and charged with smuggling undocumented immigrants.

Saturday, Jan. 4, Agents assigned to the Border Patrol Traffic Checkpoint in Sarita received information from the U. S. Customs Service regarding a truck that was possibly smuggling immigrants. The Traffic Checkpoint is located approximately 15 miles south of Kingsville, Texas. At approximately 3:45 a.m., a vehicle matching the description given by the U. S. Customs Service entered the checkpoint for inspection.

As agents inspected the vehicle, the canine on duty alerted positively to the vehicle while performing a cursory free air inspection of its exterior. The driver, responding to Agent's questions, stated that he was a United States citizen and that he was hauling tires to San Antonio. The driver was referred to the secondary inspection area after the initial alert by the canine. The canine again conducted a free air inspection of the exterior of the vehicle and alerted positively to the presence of narcotics or humans concealed inside the cargo area of the vehicle. Closer inspection of the cargo area revealed a hidden compartment amongst the piles of tires with 15 undocumented immigrants concealed inside. The 15 immigrants were extracted from the hidden compartment a little thirsty, but otherwise in good physical condition. None of them required medical attention.

The driver was arrested and charged with Alien Smuggling, 8 USC 1324. He was arraigned in Federal Court in Brownsville, Texas, today, Jan. 6, and was held without bond pending his initial appearance.

Persons found guilty of alien smuggling face penalties of 5 years imprisonment or \$5,000 fine or both for each person being smuggled. The penalties increase significantly if the persons being smuggled are harmed or die during the commission of the offense.

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